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	VCE-00	MOFM-05	MOF-01	AC-01	NSAE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01
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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5766
INFO AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
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SUBJECT: POVERTY AND REMINDERS OF WAR IN CENTRAL VIETNAM
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11. (U) SUMMARY: DIVIDED BY THE OLD DMZ, QUANG TRI AND QUANG BINH ARE UNITED IN POVERTY NOT SO MUCH BECAUSE OF WAR'S DESTRUCTION, BUT BECAUSE OF UNFAVORABLE GEOGRAPHY. REMOTE AND WITH LITTLE SURVIVING PRE-WAR INFRASTRUCTURE, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS AND A GREAT DEAL OF HARD WORK ARE ASSISTING BOTH PROVINCES TO OVERCOME THEIR POVERTY. THINLY STRETCHED LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES BOTH BUDDHIST AND CHRISTIAN FOLLOWERS IN THESE PROVINCES. END SUMMARY.

OBSURE QUANG BINH STRUGGLES WITH POVERTY; EXPECTS HELP

12. (U) VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE QUANG BINH PROVINCIAL PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE, PHAN VIET DUNG, RECEIVED POLOFF AND POL FSN ON JANUARY 9, ALONG WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF HALF A DOZEN PROVINCIAL OFFICES. THE VICE CHAIRMAN CALLED FOR US DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE, CITING THE MANY DIFFICULTIES QUANG BINH FACES, MOST NOTABLY THE HARSH WEATHER, GEOGRAPHICAL CONDITIONS, AND ITS REMOTENESS. HE DID NOT DIRECTLY BLAME THE WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH FOR SLOW PACE OF DEVELOPMENT IN QUANG BINH, MERELY SAYING THAT, "THE WAR USED TO BE QUITE FIERCE HERE". ACCORDING TO VICE CHAIRMAN DUNG, QUANG BINH'S PER CAPITA INCOME IS \$200, ABOUT HALF THE NATIONAL AVERAGE. SOME 25 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IS BELOW THE POVERTY LINE, WITH THE PERCENTAGE HIGHEST AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS LIVING IN REMOTE MOUNTAINOUS DISTRICTS. HE SAID THE PROVINCE WAS STRIVING TO REDUCE THE POVERTY RATE TO 15 PERCENT IN THE YEAR 2002. HE TOLD POLOFF THAT QUANG BINH NEEDED ASSISTANCE FROM NGOS, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND FOREIGN EMBASSIES TO REACH THAT TARGET.

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13. (SBU) WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE (WWF) IS WORKING IN QUANG BINH TO HELP PRESERVE UNUSUAL LIMESTONE MOUNTAIN FOREST HABITAT NEAR THE LAO BORDER. PART OF THE PROJECT, ACCORDING TO MARIANNE MELJBOM, A RESIDENT WWF FIELD ADVISOR WHO SPOKE TO POLOFF AND POL FSN ON JANUARY 9, CONSISTS OF RESETTLING AND IMPROVING THE LIVELIHOODS OF A FEW DOZEN ETHNIC MINORITY FAMILIES CURRENTLY LIVING WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF A NATIONAL PARK. MELJBOM POINTED OUT THAT VERY LITTLE LOGGING HAS TAKEN PLACE IN THE PARK AND SURROUNDING AREAS, LEAVING THE FOREST LARGELY INTACT AND THAT TIGERS AND A LARGE VARIETY OF PRIMATES ARE STILL FOUND IN THE AREA.

14. (U) DONG HOI TOWN, THE CAPITAL OF QUANG BINH APPEARED VERY QUIET, EVEN SLEEPY. THE LOCAL MARKET WAS MODERATELY BUSY, OFFERING A WIDE VARIETY OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES, BUT

THE TOWN'S STREETS WERE TRANQUIL ELSEWHERE. THERE WERE FEW TOURISTS IN EVIDENCE. INTERNET SERVICE APPEARED TO BE AVAILABLE ONLY AT A BRANCH POST OFFICE AND A HUE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION CENTER AND WAS FIVE TIMES MORE EXPENSIVE THAN IN HANOI. COMPUTER CLASSES AT THE EXTENSION CENTER APPEARED FULL, HOWEVER. THE BRICK RUINS OF DONG HOI'S OLD CATHOLIC CHURCH, PICTURED ON POSTCARDS AND IN HANOI'S MUSEUM OF THE REVOLUTION, WERE TURNED INTO A PARK IN 1997. A PLAQUE BEARS AN ACCOUNT OF CHURCH'S DESTRUCTION BY AMERICAN BOMBERS IN 1972. THE PARK DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN MAINTAINED FOR SOME TIME. THE PLANTER BOXES ARE CHOKED WITH WEEDS, THE ORNAMENTAL TREES HAVE DIED, AND THE PARK'S LIGHTS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN BROKEN FOR A LONG TIME. POLOFF FOUND USED SYRINGES ON THE GROUND NEAR WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE

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CHURCH'S SANCTUARY.

QUANG TRI IS OPEN AND USED TO FOREIGNERS

15. (U) THE MOST APPARENT CONTRAST BETWEEN QUANG BINH AND QUANG TRI IS THE DEGREE OF FOREIGN PRESENCE. RESIDENT FOREIGNERS IN QUANG BINH ARE FEW AND TOURISTS SEEM RARE. SEVERAL FOREIGN NGO'S OPERATE AND HAVE STAFF IN QUANG TRI, BUT ONLY FEW WORLD WILDLIFE FUND EXPERTS LIVE IN AN OUTLYING DISTRICT OF QUANG BINH. VISITS WITH SOME NGO STAFFERS IN QUANG TRI SHOWED THAT THEY HAD EXCELLENT WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS. FOREIGN TOURISTS AND BUSINESSES THAT CATER TO THEM ARE COMMON. DONG HO TOWN HAD SEVERAL INTERNAL INTERNET CAFES. ONE, THE DMZ CAFE, RUN BY AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING INDIVIDUAL WHO DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS AN ARVN VETERAN RESPONSIBLE FOR LIAISON WITH THE U.S. MARINE CORPS, BOASTED A CONNECTION SPEED TWICE AS FAST AS NORMALLY AVAILABLE IN HANOI.

16. (U) WHILE POLOFF'S VISIT SEEMED TO GENERATE A HIGH LEVEL OF INTEREST IN QUANG BINH, WITH AS MANY AS FOUR PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT NOTE-TAKERS AT SOME MEETINGS, QUANG TRI'S RECEPTION WAS FRIENDLY, BUT RATHER LOW-KEY. DURING A FIFTY-MINUTE MEETING, QUANG TRI PROVINCIAL PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE VICE CHAIRMAN NGUYEN DUC CHINH, SPENT AT LEAST TEN MINUTES DISCUSSING THE CONDITION OF SOME SURPLUS DEPARTMENT

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R 140406Z MAR 02
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OF DEFENSE MEDICAL EQUIPMENT DONATED TO THE PROVINCE IN 2001 RELATED TO THEN-PRESIDENT CLINTON'S NOVEMBER 2000 VISIT TO VIETNAM. VICE CHAIRMAN CHINH EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR THE DEFENSE ATTACHE OFFICE'S EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEMS. HE MENTIONED THE AFTERMATH OF THE WAR IN QUANG TRI, BUT EMPHASIZED THE PROVINCE'S DESIRE FOR MORE US INVESTMENT AND APPRECIATION OF ASSISTANCE TO DATE. HE REPORTED THAT AS ONE OF QUANG TRI'S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DELEGATES HE HAD VOTED FOR THE U.S.-VIETNAM BILATERAL TRADE AGREEMENT. POLOFF NOTED THAT ONE OF THE PROVINCE'S ATTRACTIONS TO FOREIGN INVESTORS WOULD BE THE EXCELLENT WORKING RELATIONSHIP FOREIGN NGO'S SEEM TO ENJOY WITH THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT.

QUANG TRI - HARD WORK TO TURN SAND INTO SOIL

17. (U) ON JANUARY 10, POLOFF AND POL STAFF VISITED A UNDP AND NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT SUPPORTED LIVELIHOOD PROJECT AND RESETTLEMENT SITE ABOUT 30 KILOMETERS SOUTHEAST OF DONG HA TOWN. THE PROJECT BENEFICIARIES, WE WERE TOLD, COME FROM A NEARBY FISHING VILLAGE ON THE COAST. ACCORDING TO THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE DISTRICT PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE, THE VILLAGE'S MEN FISH WHEN WEATHER PERMITS AND THE WOMEN SELL THE FISH IN LOCAL MARKETS. THERE IS NO FISHING FOR SEVERAL MONTHS AND WITH NO LAND AND NO OTHER TRADES, THEY ARE EXTREMELY POOR, SAID THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN. THE LIVELIHOOD AND RESETTLEMENT PROJECT AIMS TO RECLAIM NEARBY BARREN LAND FOR AGRICULTURE AND THUS IMPROVE THE COMMUNITY'S STANDARD OF LIVING.

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18. (U) UPON JOINING THE PROJECT, EACH HOUSEHOLD IS GIVEN A FEW HECTARES OF SANDY LAND ONE TO TWO KILOMETERS INLAND. MUCH OF THE CENTRAL COASTAL REGION OF VIETNAM, INCLUDING THE PROJECT SITE, IS PLAGUED WITH HIGH WINDS AND "FLYING SAND" ALL YEAR ROUND. THERE IS LITTLE WATER DURING THE DRY SEASON, AND THE SOIL, CONSISTING ALMOST ENTIRELY OF WINDBLOWN SAND, IS INFERTILE AND WILL NOT HOLD WATER. THERE IS ALMOST NO NATURAL VEGETATION AND THERE IS NO SIGN THAT ANYONE EVER TRIED TO FARM THIS LAND BEFORE.

19. (U) BESIDES LAND, EACH FAMILY REPORTEDLY RECEIVES ENOUGH RICE AND CASH TO SUSTAIN THEM FOR SIX MONTHS. THE FAMILIES ALSO RECEIVE TEN MILLION VND (USD 700) INTEREST FREE LOANS TO BUILD HOUSES, PUT IN WELLS, AND MAKE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS. NO PAYMENTS ARE REQUIRED ON THE LOANS FOR TWO YEARS. RECLAIMING THE LAND REQUIRES THAT THE FISHER-FOLK TURNED FARMERS PLANT WINDBREAKS (PRIMARILY HARDY PINES AND CASAUINAS) TO PROTECT THEIR CROPS FROM THE FLYING SAND AND TO STABILIZE THE SAND ENOUGH TO BEGIN CREATING SOIL. AFTER THREE TO FOUR YEARS THE WINDBREAKS ARE TALL AND DENSE ENOUGH TO BE EFFECTIVE. THE LABOR-INTENSIVE PROCESS OF TURNING SAND INTO SOIL BEGINS WITH ADDING PARTIALLY COMPOSTED RICE STRAW AND MANURE TO THE PLANTING BEDS. THE NEW FARMERS HAVE TO TRAVEL SEVERAL KILOMETERS TO OBTAIN THESE INPUTS. SWEET POTATOES ARE THE CROP OF CHOICE, ESPECIALLY IN THE BEGINNING, SINCE THEY ARE LESS VULNERABLE TO THE WIND, EASY FOR THE NOVICE FARMERS TO GROW, AND TOLERATE THE SAND. THE FIRST PROJECT BENEFICIARIES BEGAN RECLAIMING LAND IN 1994. WHILE THEIR SOIL IS PERCEPTIBLY BETTER THAN THE UNRECLAIMED SAND, THEY STILL ADD JUST AS MUCH RICE STRAW AND MANURE AS THEY DID IN THE BEGINNING.

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10. (U) POLOFF AND POL FSN TALKED WITH A NUMBER OF PROJECT BENEFICIARIES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. THE NEW PROJECT PARTICIPANT WE VISITED, A SINGLE MOTHER, OCCUPIED BARELY IMPROVED LAND. THE SUN GLARING OFF THE WHITE SAND WAS PAINFULLY BRIGHT. SHE SAID SHE SPENT MOST OF HER DAY MAKING RAISED PLANTING BEDS FOR HER SWEET POTATOES, ADMITTING IT WAS VERY HARD WORK. SHE HAD NEVER FARMED BEFORE, SO SHE DEPENDED ON THE PROJECT'S TECHNICAL EXPERTS FOR ADVICE, SHE SAID. A FEW HUNDRED METERS FURTHER INLAND WERE FARMS UNDER CULTIVATION FOR THREE TO FOUR YEARS. WHILE THE SOIL SHOWED LITTLE SIGN OF IMPROVEMENT, THE FARMERS WERE GROWING SEVERAL DIFFERENT CROPS AND BEGINNING TO PLANT A FEW FRUIT TREES. WITH SOME SHELTER FROM THEIR WINDBREAKS, THEIR FARMSTEADS WERE A LITTLE MORE PLEASANT THAN THE STARK FIRST YEAR FARMER'S. FINALLY WE VISITED A FARM UNDER CULTIVATION FOR SEVEN YEARS. THE FAMILY THERE ENJOYED THE SHELTER OF TALL WINDBREAKS, GREW SEVERAL DIFFERENT CROPS, WAS RAISING DUCKS AND BEGINNING TO HARVEST CITRUS, AND HAD PLANTED COCONUT PALMS. THEY EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH HOW THEIR SOIL WAS IMPROVING AND HOW THEIR STANDARD OF LIVING HAD IMPROVED. THEY SAID THEY HAD OBTAINED ADDITIONAL LOANS TO ADD ONTO THEIR HOUSE AND TO BEGIN MAKING CONCRETE ROOFING TILES. THEY SAID THAT THEIR OVERALL INCOME WAS OVER 12 MILLION VND (ABOUT USD 800) AND GROWING, FAR BETTER THAN IT HAD BEEN IN THE FISHING VILLAGE. NEIGHBORING FARMS APPEARED TO BE SIMILARLY PROSPEROUS.

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11. (U) ACCORDING TO THE DISTRICT DEPUTY CHAIRMAN, THE UNDP AND NORWEGIAN OFFICIALS WERE PLEASED WITH PROJECT'S RESULTS. HE ADDED THAT MOST OF THE SETTLERS FOUND THE PROJECT USEFUL, AND THAT APPLICATIONS TO JOIN THE PROGRAM OUTSTRIP FUNDING. WHILE THERE IS NO SHORTAGE OF UNRECLAIMED LAND, MOST OF THE FUNDING AT THIS POINT IS FROM REPAYMENT OF THE STARTUP LOANS, HE SAID. THE LACK OF FUNDING HAS HINDERED THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATION FROM EXPANDING THE PROJECT, HE COMPLAINED; THUS, THE PROVINCE NOW HOPES FOR FUNDING FROM FOREIGN NGOS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO CONDUCT SIMILAR PROJECTS IN THE AREA.

MONKS AND NUNS ABSENT IN QUANG BINH, SCARCE IN QUANG TRI

12. (SBU) ACCORDING TO LOCAL OFFICIALS, THERE ARE JUST 6 BUDDHIST TEMPLES IN QUANG BINH PROVINCE, AND NO RESIDENT MONKS OR NUNS. EXPLAINING THE SITUATION, PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENT FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS AND MOUNTAINOUS REGIONS STAFF SAID NO ONE FROM QUANG BINH HAD EVER WANTED TO ENTER RELIGIOUS LIFE. LATER, THICH CHANH LIEM, THE HEAD OF QUANG TRI'S PROVINCIAL BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION AND ABBOT OF CHAU QUANG PAGODA, CONFIRMED THAT THERE WERE FEW BUDDHISTS IN QUANG BINH, BUT DID RECALL THAT AT LEAST ONE FAMOUS LIVING MONK WAS A QUANG BINH NATIVE. THICH CHANH LIEM SAID THAT QUANG TRI'S POPULATION WAS 70 TO 80 PERCENT BUDDHIST. HOWEVER, WHILE THERE ARE 170 SHRINES SCATTERED AROUND THE PROVINCE, THERE ARE ONLY THREE MAJOR PAGODAS, ALL IN DONG HO TOWN. HE SAID THAT THE FACILITIES WERE IN POOR CONDITION.

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MOREOVER, QUANG TRI HAD VERY FEW MONKS AND NUNS COMPARED TO OTHER PROVINCES. THE ABBOT SAID THAT THE ASSOCIATION PLANS TO OPEN A SCHOOL TO TRAIN MONKS. THEY HAVE NOT APPLIED FOR PERMISSION YET BECAUSE, ACCORDING TO THE ABBOT, THE AUTHORITIES REQUIRE THAT THE SCHOOL HAVE 50 - 60 STUDENTS, BUT THERE ARE ONLY ABOUT 30 CANDIDATES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE.

LOTS OF CATHOLICS, BUT NOT MANY PRIESTS

13. (SBU) FOUR PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS ACCOMPANIED POLOFF AND POL STAFF TO A MEETING WITH THE PROVINCE'S SENIOR CATHOLIC PRIEST AT HUONG PHUONG PARISH NORTHWEST OF DONG HOI. ACCORDING TO PROVINCIAL RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS OFFICIALS AND THE PRIEST, THERE ARE ROUGHLY 85,000 CATHOLIC BELIEVERS AND 12 PRIESTS (ABOUT ONE PER 7000 BELIEVERS) IN QUANG BINH'S 26 PARISHES. THE PROVINCE'S PARISHES ARE A SUBDIVISION OF THE DIOCESE OF VINH, ACCORDING TO THE PRIEST, WHO SAID AS CURATE, HE WAS ADMINISTRATIVELY IN CHARGE OF THE PROVINCE'S PARISHES BECAUSE THEY WERE TOO FAR FROM VINH FOR THE BISHOP TO MANAGE. HE SAID THAT THE BISHOP VISITS EACH OF QUANG BINH'S PARISHES ONCE EVERY THREE YEARS. HE ADDED THAT THE CATHOLICS INTEND TO APPLY TO FORM A NEW DIOCESE WHEN THEY HAVE ENOUGH PRIESTS." HE DID NOT INDICATE WHEN THAT CONDITION WOULD BE MET. THE PRIEST INDICATED THAT MOST CATHOLICS LIVE IN LARGELY CATHOLIC VILLAGES AND ARE FAIRLY CONCENTRATED GEOGRAPHICALLY. THERE WAS ANOTHER CATHOLIC CHURCH ONLY TWO KILOMETERS FROM HUONG PHUONG. HUONG PHUONG PARISH'S CHURCH BUILDING WAS ONLY A FEW YEARS OLD AND ACCOMMODATED 800 OR MORE PEOPLE FOR SUNDAY SERVICES. THE PRIEST ALSO NOTED THAT NUNS PLAY A LARGE ROLE IN CHURCH

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EDUCATION. HE SAID THAT HE WAS ON THE PROVINCE'S FATHERLAND FRONT COMMITTEE AND REMARKED THAT CATHOLICS IN QUANG BINH HAD BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN DEMONSTRATING THAT THEY WERE GOOD CITIZENS AND CONTRIBUTED TO NATIONAL CONSTRUCTION. THUS, HE CONCLUDED, THEY WERE FREE TO PRACTICE THEIR RELIGION WITHOUT INTERFERENCE. HOWEVER, WHILE HE EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT PROGRAMS FOR TRAINING PRIESTS (QUANG BINH HAD ONLY SIX PRIESTS WHEN HE BECAME CURATE ABOUT TEN YEARS AGO), THE CHURCH COULD HAVE DONE MUCH BETTER FOR BELIEVERS HAD THEY MORE PRIESTS. HE SAID THAT HE WAS NOT AWARE OF ANY

PROTESTANTS IN THE PROVINCE.

14. (SBU) FATHER TRAN VAN TUYEN MET POLOFF AND POL STAFF ON JANUARY 11 AT THE DONG HA TOWN PARISH CHURCH. HE SAID THAT HE WAS ORDAINED IN 1968 IN HUE AND HAD BEEN IN HIS CURRENT PARISH FOR FOUR YEARS. QUANG TRI'S ROUGHLY TWO DOZEN PARISHES SHARE NINE PRIESTS AND AVERAGE ABOUT 500 - 600 MEMBERS. THE PRIEST SAID THAT HIS PARISH IS QUITE LARGE AND THAT HE "COULD HARDLY HANDLE THE WORK." HE SAID, NODDING AT THE PROVINCIAL PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE PRESENT, THEY HAD APPLIED FOR A VICAR TO EASE THE PROBLEM, BUT HAD RECEIVED NO RESPONSE FROM THE AUTHORITIES. HE ADDED, "OBVIOUSLY THERE IS JUST TOO MUCH WORK FOR ALL THE PRIESTS" IN QUANG TRI. THEY ARE PART OF THE DIOCESE OF HUE AND A BISHOP VISITS EACH PARISH EVERY THIRD YEAR. MOST OF THE CHURCH BUILDINGS, HE SAID, WERE DESTROYED DURING THE WAR AND ONLY A FEW HAVE BEEN REBUILT. DONG HA PARISH'S CHURCH

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BUILDING WAS ONLY TWO YEARS OLD, REBUILT WITH FUNDING RAISED BY A CATHOLIC PRIEST IN FRANCE, FATHER TUYEN REMARKED. WHEN ASKED ABOUT PLANS FOR THE CHURCH BUILDING AT THE LA VANG PILGRIMAGE SITE NORTH OF DONG HO, FATHER TUYEN SAID THAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAD REQUESTED, BUT NOT YET RECEIVED, PERMISSION TO UPGRADE THE SIMPLE ALUMINUM AND GLASS STRUCTURE LOCATED BEHIND THE RUINED FACADE OF THE CHURCH BUILDING DESTROYED LATE IN THE VIETNAM WAR. FATHER TUYEN ALSO SAID THAT DONG HO'S ONE PROTESTANT FAMILY ATTENDED CATHOLIC SERVICES ON MAJOR HOLIDAYS.

LEMONADE FROM LEMONS

15. (SBU) COMMENT: POVERTY, DUE PRIMARILY TO POOR SOIL, UNFAVORABLE WEATHER, AND DISTANCE FROM TRADE CENTERS, IS THE DOMINANT FACTOR IN THESE TWO PROVINCES. THE EAGERNESS OF QUANG TRI'S RESETTLED FISHING FAMILIES TO UNDERTAKE THE BACKBREAKING WORK OF TURNING BLOWING SAND INTO PRODUCTIVE FARMLAND INDICATES HOW POOR THIS PART OF VIETNAM IS. WAR DAMAGE AND THE AFTEREFFECTS OF WAR CONTRIBUTE TO THIS POVERTY, BUT THE WAR'S LEGACY HAS ALSO BROUGHT ATTENTION TO QUANG TRI, IF NOT TO QUANG BINH. PHYSICAL REMINDERS OF THE WAR, LIKE THE RUINS OF THE CHURCHES AT LA VANG AND DONG HOI, SEEM SOMEWHAT ANACHRONISTIC AND OUT OF STEP WITH THE OVERALL MESSAGE OF TRYING TO OVERCOME POVERTY WITH WHATEVER MEANS ARE OFFERED, THAT ONE HEARS IN THESE PROVINCES.

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